



Dr A Sivakumar explains the significance of design to a retailer and outlines the effective use of design elements in successful stores

The design difference

Increasing competition in the Indian retail market has made it imperative for brick and mortar retail marketers to position their products uniquely in comparison to their competitors. One tangible way to look at differentiation is to concentrate on the physical design components of the store. Dramatic and fun-centric store designs and visuals could act as key drivers of differentiation. Customers want to visit stores which have an ambience and where shopping is an enjoyable experience, rather than an arduous task. Store design and style continue to draw customers into stores and convert them into frequent visitors. Additionally, attractive and dramatic graphic store design can also turn these frequent visitors, who are primarily window shoppers, into actual buyers.

There is a need to formulate graphics and designs that integrate directly into images as well as the products sold in the store and entails more than the mere combining of colours. It means beginning with the product in mind, and exploring design options that showcase the products or services to encourage sales. In other words, the process involves designing for the sake of marketing rather than designing for the sake of design. The Internet has been motivating retailers to find new and exciting ways to lure and invite customers. A dynamic retail environment, combined with customer interaction, provides a competitive advantage to brick and mortar retailers when compared to e-retailers.

Design and store image

The retailer needs to be aware of design and how it can positively impact a store's image. Many retailers get so used to their current design that they give little thought

to various existing possibilities. Retailers should put themselves in the shoes of their customers, looking at the store with the same mindset as a first time customer entering the store.

Empathising with the customer is the first step towards changing the ambience of the store. The question that needs to be asked is: Is there something that will attract the customer into your store or something that will promote curiosity? That first impression of the customer creates an image about who you are, and what you have to sell. If the store looks drab and boring, that perception will affect your image and the image that the people have about the quality of your products and services.

The next step is to decide what you want the image to be and then build your design around this image.

Traffic flow

Traffic flow must be designed in consonance with the image of the store. A discount store may have little space to stimulate faster movement of customer and faster delivery to manage a huge crowd on a regular basis. In the case of relatively premium stores there is a need to give customers plenty of room to move around and allow easy access to the cash register. Any visuals or products drawing a lot of attention should be easily visible. One should be cautious about drawing the customer's attention to off-limits areas.

In services marketing, physical evidence, (to rhyme with other 6Ps) as part of the 7Ps, must be consistent so as to project a unique image. In that respect, design of the store plays a crucial role. The foremost question to ask before putting on the thinking cap on store design is: What is the store's main objective? Is it

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ROOMY CONFINES

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impulse purchase, lingering customers or education? Answering this question will give the retailer a new perspective on how to make the store customer-friendly.

The play with colours

Once a brand image is identified and the feel, flow and objective are determined, the element of colour should be considered. On the most basic physical level we all share similar responses to colour. Wavelengths of reflected light (colour) stimulate our nervous and endocrine systems, creating distinct biological responses. Our heart rate and blood pressure can increase while observing intensely saturated red and orange hues. We can become sleepy, anxious, or even

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get headaches while gazing upon large areas of bright whites or greys. Or we can achieve a sense of well being when surrounded by a combination of cool and warm hues. However, for the most part these responses happen beyond our awareness. How do all these instinctual responses relate to retail? Simple. By relating to a person's innate responses, colour can make the difference between whether a customer buys one item or 20. After all, we're all influenced to some degree by the colours that surround us.

The key to using colours for specific purposes within a retail environment is the understanding of both physiological and psychological influences. In the retail atmosphere the main goal is to help the customer simultaneously identify with both the environment and the products, generating a healthy sale and a satisfied customer. The following are questions to consider as well as some basic principles that may be used as guidelines when choosing your retail colour palette:

- ◆ Define the goals and the culture of the business.
- ◆ Who are the customers?
- ◆ What should they experience?
- ◆ Are they teenagers, thirty-something parents, seniors?
- ◆ Do you want to generate excitement or quiet interest?
- ◆ Do you want to create a space that is festive, trendy,

utilitarian and funky, or elegant and sophisticated? the physical space large or small and intimate?
◆ Is there any natural light available?

After these questions have been answered, retailers should consider the psychological associations we have with various colours:

- Red:** assertive, exciting, passionate, warm
- Pink:** stimulates desire for sweets
- Orange:** sociable, "folk-style," implies affordable; currently a trend colour
- Blue:** relaxing, refreshing, cool, symbolizes trust, integrity, and intuition
- Green:** nurturing; has universal appeal; can be showy and dynamic
- Brown and earth colours:** stable, secure, friendly, receptive, and related to instinct
- Yellow:** cheerful, communicative, casual, and youthful
- Purple/Violet:** deep version is mysterious, serious; pastel shade favourite with young girls!

- White:** unifies; brings life to other colours; culturally ambiguous; cold / impersonal, and sterile
- Black:** culturally ambiguous and formal
- Gray:** implies ambiguity when mixed in hues; trend metallic/pearl versions are more mysterious

Creating a successful palette is all about balance. Combinations of colour and lighting will influence response. Therefore the balance of hue, value, contrast and light reflectivity is vital. Strong colour, high contrast, and more patterning will create a more stimulating environment. Close tones and lower light reflectance values will create a place where people will linger. Comfortable, sophisticated neutrals and more subtle textures can be punctuated with strong hues; mixed materials for visual interest.

The subject of colour is quite vast. Colours that surround a person will definitely influence that person to some degree. The challenge lies in creating a successful colour palette that allows its influence on customers to work for you.

Colours should be consistent with the corporate look. Colour schemes should be carried throughout the store and coordinated with fixtures. The dominant colour scheme acts as a reminder for the store when colour is encountered in any other setting. It helps it aided recall of the store. When using bright splashes

LIGHTING MOODS

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COLOUR BRANDING

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RETAIL ROADMAP

colour, it needs to be ensured that let the customers' eyes don't get distracted. Surrounding areas of bright colour with areas of neutrality, give the eyes specific focal points with direction toward the product.

Graphics

Once the colours are selected, consider incorporating graphic images that feature products, welcome and thank you signs, or general artwork relating to the store's image. Other considerations for graphics are counter cards, tile printing, textured graphics, fabric banners and photomurals. Today's technology allows for photographic reproductions on almost any surface, from floors and walls to many different fabrics and tiles. A larger-than-life graphic can be created by electro statically printing an image onto adhesive vinyl, and then applying the adhesive vinyl to the wall in multiple panels, in a similar fashion as wallpaper.

Floor designs

Floor designs are becoming more popular; particularly in malls with multiple levels or atriums that give shoppers a bird's eye view of the floor design. When you see it from above, it creates a far more dramatic effect. Often, shopping centres add designs that complement a property's name, theme or logo. Technology available now provides the means to cut intricate shapes in a variety of materials, such as tile, stone, metal and vinyl flooring. Recent innovations in water-jet technology have been instrumental in advancing the trend in intricate floor designs. Materials used to create floor designs include ceramic tile, terrazzo and stone.

Ceramic has become one of the most popular choices for creating distinctive designs because it can be cut into any number of intricate shapes, and the tile comes in thousands of colours. Regardless of the chosen material or technique, the overall trend in the retail industry is to use flooring products to enhance the design scheme of a shopping centre or retail store. It's not always the merchandise. It is the decor of the store that is attracting the buyer.

Another flooring trend has retailers moving their own floor designs farther out into common areas of malls to attract customers. Flooring can be used like signage to lead shoppers into a store. Retailers and shopping centre owners alike are using a variety of

flooring products to capture shopper attention. Designers are searching for stone-flooring products that feature a variety of textures. The textured stone can provide greater slip-resistance compared with other products. The texture also can be used as an aesthetic

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feature to provide more variation to the polished flooring. For example, textured-stone pieces can be used in conjunction with polished stone to create decorative patterns or borders.

One of the most popular uses of ceramic tile these days is to create a mosaic design within the floor pattern. Designs range from creating an image, such as a rosette, to duplicating a company logo in a tiled entryway. We can see ceramic being used in all aspects of retail, from the main floor of a shopping centre itself all the way into tenant stores, whether they be restaurant or retail. Ceramic tile offers a very strong combination of great aesthetic and design capability, along with positive performance attributes such as durability, slip-resistance, scratch-resistance and good maintenance properties.

The eyes of retail shoppers, although sharp and exacting, are often encouraged to appreciate the forest for its trees. If store design succeeds in its mission, then its smaller components – such as colour choice or fixture materials – lose their individual significance as they contribute to a refined, unified environment.

To shoppers, the store makes its design and image impressions as a whole while unselfishly giving the merchandise the store's top billing. But for designers, a retail environment may truly succeed by what shoppers do not consciously absorb. Each building block component of retail store design – its materials, colours and textures – must be harmoniously matched, manipulated and enjoined to create a warm, inviting retail space. The retailer needs to appreciate the impact of the primary design elements in the creating an image for the store. ♦

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